

CHRIST IN THE TABERNACLE

by

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CHAPTER ONE

“AN EARTHLY SANCTUARY” WITH A HEAVENLY MEANING

WHEN God told Moses to build the tabernacle in the wilderness, according to the pattern which He showed him in the mount, He said:

“Speak unto the children of Israel . . . And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:2, 8).

When the inspired apostle explained the spiritual significance of this, God's dwelling place among His people, Israel, He said to the Hebrew Christians:

“We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Hebrews 8:1, 2).

These words from the New Testament not only give us the Holy Spirit's commentary on the meaning of the tabernacle in the wilderness; but they are the key that unlocks a vast treasure of spiritual truth regarding the **“earthly sanctuary”** which Moses built, in order that God might dwell among His people.

If we would understand the New Testament teaching concerning this Jewish tabernacle, which was **“a shadow of good things to come”** (Hebrews 10:1), we should compare the Exodus record with the Epistle to the Hebrews, especially chapters eight and nine, which deal with the tabernacle in particular, though primarily with the ministry of Christ, our Great High Priest, in **“the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.”**

This comparison of the Old Testament with the New will unfold to us **“The Glories of Christ As Foreshadowed in the Jewish Tabernacle.”** Yea, it will reveal to us the wonders of the prophetic Scriptures, wherein the Holy Spirit **“testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow”** (I Peter 1:11).

In connection with the typical significance of the Jewish tabernacle, we have one of the many clear proofs that *the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed; whereas the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.*

Jehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus of the New. And the Triune God gave to Israel the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the offerings, in order that sinful man might recognize the promised Saviour, and understand the significance of His mission and death.

When our Lord was among men, He was repeatedly bidding those who heard His teaching to study the Old Testament Scriptures. To the unbelieving Jews He said,

“Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me . . . Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote for me” (John 5:39, 46).

By **“the scriptures”** Christ meant the Old Testament; for the New Testament was not written until after He died, arose from the dead, and went back to heaven. And when He said, **“Moses wrote of me,”** He included Exodus; for Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

To the two disciples on the way to Emmaus the risen Lord also said that the prophets had foretold **“the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”**

“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27; cf. 24:26).

Again, to the ten disciples, still later in the same evening, He said,

“These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44).

That the tabernacle was typical of Christ and His redemptive work on the cross is clear from many statements in the New Testament, some of which we shall consider in these studies. All the ministry of the priests in this **“earthly sanctuary,”** yea, even the sanctuary itself, served as a series of object lessons concerning salvation, sinful man's access to a holy God, and his worship of the Redeemer of sinners. It is as though God had painted a portrait of Christ some fifteen hundred years before He was to be born into the world as the Child of Bethlehem, in order that when He did tabernacle among men as the only begotten Son of God, all the world might recognize Him as the promised Saviour.

Years ago, when I first left Australia to come to America, my mother gave me photographs of my aunts and uncles in England, whom I was to visit en route. I had never seen them; for I was born in Australia, and had never been to England to visit them.

On board the boat I studied these photographs very carefully; I wanted to be sure to recognize my relatives at the pier. And sure enough, I did know them, because their likenesses were stamped upon my mind.

Had the Jews of our Lord's day confined their studies to the Old Testament, free from the traditions of men, they would have recognized their Messiah in a moment. If all men of this Christian era would only study the New Testament in the light of the Old, they would look with wonder and awe upon the portrait of Christ in the Old Testament; for it is a true likeness of the suffering, risen, interceding, and reigning Lord Jesus. And such a picture we are to behold in the study of the Jewish tabernacle, which we begin today. There is no portion of the Scriptures that will better establish a young believer in the faith and show him his position in Christ than that of the Jewish tabernacle. Every part of this "sanctuary" has a finger pointing to Christ and a tongue to tell forth His glory.

EXODUS — THE BOOK OF REDEMPTION

Exodus, the book in which the description of the tabernacle is found, logically follows Genesis, and precedes the three remaining books of Moses which come afterwards. Genesis tells the story of man's failure. Opening with the sublime expression, "**In the beginning God . . .**" it closes with the symbolic words, "**. . . in a coffin in Egypt.**"

From a perfect creation to sin and death, yet with hope through the promised Saviour — this is the story of Genesis.

- Exodus is the book of Redemption.
- Leviticus tells how sinful man may worship a holy God.
- Numbers is the record of God's gracious guidance, in spite of human failure and murmuring.
- Deuteronomy is a rehearsal of God's way with His redeemed, yet stumbling people.

This, in brief, is the setting of the book which gives us the description, not only of the pattern of the tabernacle that God gave to Moses on the mount, but also of the building of that sanctuary, in which He dwelt among His people. The entire book of Exodus covers forty chapters, thirteen of which have to do entirely with the tabernacle and the priests who were to minister therein.

Almost all of the latter half of the book is given over to a description of this tent of meeting between God and His redeemed children. But before mention is made of the tabernacle, the story of redemption is written in language that cannot be mistaken.

Joseph had died; the good Pharaoh had died; and Israel was in bitter bondage. The opening chapter of this wonderful book tells the story of the slavery into which the "**Pharaoh which knew not Joseph**" had bound God's people.

Israel's bondage to Egypt's wicked king is a picture of the sinner's bondage to Satan and sin.

Israel had no tabernacle in which to worship God, no deliverer to lead her out from under the task master's cruel lash, no Shekinah Glory to assure her that God was her Leader and Guide.

Before the sinner can know any thing of God's gracious guidance, he must know Him as a Deliverer, a Redeemer, and a Saviour.

The children of Israel were given a deliverer from the bondage of Egypt in the person of Moses; sinners are offered the only Saviour from bondage to Satan in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The story of the birth of Moses, his training for service, and his call from God to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage is told in the early chapters of Exodus. Then follows the record of God's righteous judgment upon those who turned an unheeding ear and a rebellious heart toward God, the only Deliverer and Redeemer. The ten plagues upon the Egyptians, only the first three of which came upon Israel, were judgments meted out to a stiff-necked king, who, together with his people, defied the living Lord. Likewise, all who refuse to accept God's salvation in Christ Jesus must go into judgment, into everlasting torment, and eternal separation from God. Only by faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ can the sinner be saved, redeemed from bondage to Satan and sin.

The last of the ten plagues upon Egypt was associated with the first Passover in Israel. And the paschal lamb was one of the most perfect types of Jesus, **“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29).

We cannot go into this beautiful lesson just here; but the sprinkled blood on the lintels and door posts, suggestive of the cross of Jesus; the eating of the lamb roast with fire; the safety of those sheltered behind the sprinkled blood — these are but a few of the lessons given to us in this first Passover kept in Egypt.

Did not the Lord Himself say unto Moses, **“When I see the blood, I will pass over you”** (Exodus 12:13)? And did not the inspired apostle say, many centuries later, **“Even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us”** (I Corinthians 5:7)?

It was not by accident or mere chance that the Lord Jesus was crucified on the feast of the Passover, as all four of the evangelists plainly tell us. It was not by chance that He kept the last Passover, the last supper, with His disciples just before He went to the cross. He came to die at His own appointed time — the Passover Lamb!

Redemption? What book in all the Word of God tells a more heart-searching story of God's redemption in Christ Jesus than does this second book of Moses?

Exodus is a continued story of God's redemption; for immediately after that first Passover, Israel was delivered from the hosts of the Egyptians as she passed through the Red Sea on dry ground. The enemy pursued from behind; in front of her were the waters that spoke of death through drowning. On each side the mountains and the wilderness closed in around fleeing Israel. But God was the Guide. In the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night He led His people, standing between her and the enemy all night, causing the Red Sea to stand up like a wall on both sides, delivering His otherwise helpless, yet redeemed nation. It is another beautiful picture of God's redemption for all who will put their trust in His beloved Son.

From the Red Sea on, the story is one of wilderness wandering for forty years; and in Exodus we read of how God fed His people with the manna and gave them drink from the smitten rock.

Christ said that the bread from heaven was but a type of Him who came down from the Father, the Bread of Life for a heart hungry world. (See John 6:27-63.) And Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, saying that the smitten rock was a type of Christ — **“That Rock was Christ”** (I Corinthians 10:4). He was **“smitten of God, and afflicted”** (Isaiah 53:4), that the thirsty soul might drink the Living Water that gives everlasting life.

In order to show His redeemed people how helpless they were in their own strength, how necessary it was for the sinless Son of God to keep His holy law, God gave to Israel the Ten Commandments and the detailed explanation of their meaning — in the book of Exodus.

Israel presumptuously said that she would obey God's law; but how little did she know her own frailty; for not long afterwards she had broken that holy law and was dancing naked around a golden calf! Idolatry, linked with heathen evils! **“By the law is the knowledge of sin”** (Romans 3:20). And a people redeemed by faith in the shed blood of Calvary's Lamb who was to come, learned that they could never, never measure up to God's perfect standard of holiness; that they needed a Saviour who could and would keep that law for them as none other could ever do.

That is the story of Exodus up to the part which tells of the tabernacle, in which God was to dwell among His redeemed people.

Beginning with chapter twenty-five, we have the description of the pattern of this sanctuary, which God gave to Moses upon Mount Sinai, together with His instructions concerning the priests who were to minister in the tabernacle, and how they were to be clothed and consecrated for their sacred office.

Then we read the story of the broken law; Moses' confession of Israel's sin; his intercession for his people; and God's giving to him a second time the Ten Commandments written upon two tables of stone with **“the finger of God.”** The last six chapters of the book tell of the building of the tabernacle **“according to the pattern”** given by the Lord to Moses. And Exodus closes with the tabernacle finished, the Shekinah Glory filling the tabernacle and overshadowing it in the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.

God was dwelling in the midst of His redeemed people! It is the story of redemption, and a picture of salvation in Christ Jesus, who dwells “in the midst” of His blood-bought children. Christ Himself is the Passover Lamb. His cross is the altar. He is the Priest.

THE TABERNACLE — A SHADOW OF THE CROSS

Before we begin the detailed study of the tabernacle, let us take a bird's eye view of this sanctuary in the midst of encamped Israel. The very pieces of furniture were arranged in the form of a cross; and each article of furniture spoke of Christ, the Lord. The tents of three tribes of Israel were pitched on each side, the tabernacle literally **“in the midst.”**

The second chapter of the book of Numbers tells the location of each tribe. Judah was on the east, directly in front of the gate of the court; for Christ was to come from the tribe of Judah, and the gate speaks to us of Him who is “**the way**” to God. On the east also were the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun; on the south, Reuben, Simeon, and Gad; on the west, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin; and on the north, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

Between the tents of the twelve tribes and the tabernacle, there were the tents of Moses and Aaron and the priests on the east; those of the three families of the Levites on the other three sides. The third chapter of Numbers gives us the location of the Levites.

We remember that Levi, one of the sons of Jacob, had three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. These three became the fathers of the three families of Levites, each of which had certain duties to perform in connection with the service in the tabernacle. The Gershonites lived on the west of this sanctuary; the Kohathites, on the south; the Merarites, on the north. They were to minister before God on behalf of His people.

Only the priests could go into the Holy Place; only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year. But the Levites helped in taking down the tabernacle for the march, in erecting it again when God meant for His people to rest, and in carrying the parts that went toward making this beautiful and costly “**tent of the congregation.**”

The court of the tabernacle was made of fine white linen, fastened on pillars of brass, set up in the sand in sockets of brass. There was only one entrance to this court, only one way of access to God. As we said a moment ago, the gate speaks to us of Christ, the only Way to God and heaven.

Directly in front of the gate was the brazen altar of burnt offering, where the animal sacrifices were offered up to God. And directly west of that was the brazen laver, where the priests had to wash their hands and feet before they could enter into the Holy Place to minister before God. The altar of burnt offering is another picture of Christ, the Lamb of God; the laver, of Christ, our Cleanser from the daily defilement of sin.

The tabernacle itself consisted of two rooms: the Holy Place, twice as long as it was wide; and the Holy of Holies. a perfect cube. The veil separated the two rooms.

In the Holy Place there were three pieces of furniture: the golden altar of incense, just in front of the veil, and directly in line with the altar of burnt offering and the laver in the outer court; the golden candlestick on the south; and the golden covered table of shewbread on the north, just opposite the candlestick. Before the golden altar the priests stood, offering incense, even as they prayed for their people.

The golden candlestick was kept burning with the only light the Holy Place had. And on the table of shewbread there were twelve loaves, one for each tribe. It seems hardly necessary to explain that these three beautiful pieces of furniture speak to us of Christ, our Intercessor and Priest; Christ, the Light of the World; and Christ, the Bread of Life.

Within the Holy of Holies there was the golden covered ark of the covenant, over which was the mercy seat, and in which were the Ten Commandments — later the golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded were placed in the ark. Above the mercy seat, between the golden cherubim, stood the Shekinah Glory, the Lord Himself; and on and before the mercy seat was the sprinkled blood. This Ark of the Covenant was directly in line with the golden altar, only the veil separating them. And thus the shadow of the cross was made in the God-given arrangement of these six pieces of furniture, each of which spoke eloquently of the coming Redeemer.

The veil, too, was a wonderful type of our Lord; for although it separated the sinner from God's presence, when Christ died on the cross, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from top to bottom, by the Lord Himself, even as **“his flesh”** was bruised and broken for sinful man, opening the **“way into the holiest of all”** by His own shed blood. (See Hebrews 9.7, 8; 10:19, 20.)

We said a moment ago that we wanted to get a bird's eye view of the tabernacle, with God's people encamped around it. No one but God could actually do this; for over the tabernacle were four coverings, forming the only “roof” this tent of meeting had, hiding from the gaze of men the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. We shall not describe these coverings now; but they, too, foreshadowed in a remarkable way the Person and work of our Lord.

In our later studies we shall consider the boards and bars and sockets that formed the completed structure; the curtains and the coverings; the pieces of furniture — all a detailed and marvelous picture of Christ.

Today we have attempted only to present in outline some idea of what the tabernacle was like. It would be well if each reader would read very carefully all of the book of Exodus, especially the portion beginning with chapter twenty-five, the first of the God-given description of the pattern which was shown to Moses on the mount. We can not hope to get the most from a later study of these details unless we first have clearly in mind the general plan. Hence this brief outline view.

As we read these chapters, we shall note that God began with the beautiful Ark of the Covenant, and described the tabernacle from within toward the court without; whereas the sinner looked toward the tabernacle from the gate to the brazen altar. Of course, only his representative, the priest, could enter the Holy Place; and only the high priest could go on into the presence of God in the Most Holy Place once a year.

In these studies we shall begin at the gate and the altar, leading on to the presence of the Lord God. The sinner must meet God first at the altar of sacrifice before he may talk to Him in prayer and enter into His very throne room, by faith in the shed blood of His well-beloved Son! Our God came down from heaven to a manger and a cross; we may draw near to Him as we meet Him first at the foot of that cross; and only then may we go on with Him into heaven itself.

THE FREEWILL OFFERINGS FOR THE TABERNACLE

It was a very costly tabernacle, yet a tent still. God's people lived in tents; and in a beautiful tent He dwelt among them. It was a very, very costly sacrifice the Lord Jesus made when He left heaven's glory to “tabernacle” among men (John 1:14).

It cost Him His own precious blood. But His people whom He came to redeem lived in “earthly tabernacles” of the flesh. Therefore, in order to save sinners, He did not become an angel; He became a Man, **“that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil”** (Hebrews 2:14; cf. Hebrews 2:14-18).

And where did Israel obtain the thousands of dollars for the erection of the tabernacle? From their hard-earned wages when they left Egypt on that wonderful night. Exodus tells the story: Israel had worked long as slaves, in bitter bondage; therefore, God told His people to ask from the Egyptians their wages, jewels of silver and gold and all the precious things which He knew they would need, which He knew they had earned. God did not tell His people to take what He knew they could not pay back; He did tell them to ask for what they had earned. (See Exodus 11:2; 12:35, 36. The word “**lent**” in verse 36 is literally “*gave*”).

The people were told by the Lord, through Moses, to bring only such things as they wanted to present “**willingly**” unto Him, “**an offering**” from “**the heart**” (Exodus 25:2). And the wonderful result was that they brought so much that he had to tell them not to bring any more. **“So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much”** (Exodus 36:6, 7).

Need we comment upon this lesson in giving unto the Lord? If God's people today would bring “willingly” an offering from the heart, according to the way in which He has prospered them, then the pleas from the pagan world would not go unheeded; the cries of the missionary heart for more labourers in the harvest field would be heard and answered. May God help us to give as Israel did of old!

No stranger was to have a part in these gifts for the building of the tabernacle. Nor does God want the money of unsaved men to be used in winning “**living stones**” for “**the temple of the Holy Ghost**,” which is His church.

THE WORKMEN

God called two chosen men to oversee the building of the tabernacle.

Every house has to have an architect, a contractor, someone to plan and to carry out that plan. God put in charge of the house that He Himself had planned Bezaleel, of the tribe of Judah; and Aholiab, of the tribe of Dan.

Concerning Bezaleel He said, in Exodus 31:16:

“I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.”

The helpers of Bezaleel were Aholiab and all the “**wise hearted**.” God gave them wisdom for the

work, even as in every age His work can be done only by those who are given **“the wisdom that is from above”** (James 1:5; 3:17).

GOD IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE

In the beginning of this lesson we read from the inspired record that God's purpose in asking Moses to build the tabernacle was that He might dwell among His people whom He redeemed. It has always been God's desire to have fellowship with His creatures.

In the Garden of Eden He talked with Adam, taking to our first parent the animals of His creation, to see what Adam would call them. **“And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.”**

Thus God set His seal of approval upon what man did, while man rejoiced in the works of God's hands. But sin entered to mar that beautiful fellowship! And ever since the fall of man, God has been seeking the sinner desiring to restore that broken fellowship and communion. Man was put at a distance from God through sin; yet God's heart of love remained the same.

He walked with Enoch for more than three hundred years. He bade Noah enter the ark, saying, not “Go,” but **“Come.”** God was with Noah in that ark. During the patriarchal age God talked with His chosen ones; appeared unto them; held sweet communion with them; ever pointing them on to the Saviour who was to come. And now, in the wilderness, He wanted to dwell in a tent, in the fiery, cloudy pillar, holding communion with His people on the basis of the shed blood of the sacrifice which foreshadowed the blood of Christ.

Still later, when Israel possessed the land of Canaan and lived in houses, God told Solomon to build Him a house, the beautiful temple in Jerusalem. Again, He filled it with His glory, departing from it only when the sins of His people separated them from their God.

The centuries passed. Then one day God came down to “tabernacle” among men, **“Immanuel, God with us,” “God manifest in the flesh.”** He walked and talked with men. A few loved Him and received His love. Many more scorned Him, mocked Him, spat upon Him, crucified Him, thrust Him out of the world at the point of a spear. And then He sent His Holy Spirit into the hearts of those who would receive Him, even the Third Person of the Trinity, who abides with His church forever.

And that brings us to this blessed truth: not only does the tabernacle in the wilderness speak to us of the Lord Jesus; it does, first and primarily; but it also speaks to us of the living temple which is His church, **“the habitation of God through the Spirit,”** the body and the bride of our Lord Jesus Christ. Each blood-bought child of God, from Pentecost to the Rapture, is a **“living stone”** in that building for eternity. And **“where two or three are gathered together”** in His name, there He dwells with them **“in the midst”** (Matthew 18:20). He seeks the fellowship of His redeemed.

In the millennium He will dwell in the midst of His earthly people, Israel, with His heavenly bride reigning with Him in glory. Then in the eternal state His great desire for fellowship with

His own will be fully realized.

God will dwell in the midst of His people, indeed; and He will be **“all and in all.”** His rest will then be absolute, eternal, and glorious. There will be no more sin and sorrow. There will be no more curse. God Himself shall wipe away all tears. Of this future day of rejoicing the beloved disciple wrote, saying,

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:3).

As we enter upon this wonderful study of the Jewish tabernacle, **“a shadow of good things to come,”** this earthly sanctuary with a heavenly meaning, may the Holy Spirit prepare our hearts to receive the deeply spiritual message of this portion of the sacred Scriptures. Then only shall we see **“The Glories of Christ as Foreshadowed in the Jewish Tabernacle.”**

And now, as we bring this first lesson to a close, may we let Him remind us from His infallible Word that in Christ **“dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily”** (Colossians 2:9); and that our bodies are **“the temple of the Holy Ghost”** (I Corinthians 6:19).

It is a solemn thought, a heart-searching thought — that we have been **“bought with a price,”** even the precious blood of the Son of God! As we see, from our study of the Jewish tabernacle, how God was preparing His people for the manifestation of Him who was to “tabernacle” among men; then as we see how He was also picturing the union of Christ and His church, surely we shall praise Him with ever-increasing adoration for such grace!

My unsaved friend, you cannot see the beauties of Him, of whom the tabernacle speaks, unless you meet Him at His cross. Only the believer-priests may enter into His presence! But He invites you to meet Him at Calvary, be saved, born again, by faith in His atoning blood. Then you, too, immediately become a member of that temple, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. You will not be interested in this series of studies unless you love our Lord Jesus. But once you love Him, you will let the Holy Spirit take the things of Christ, and show them unto you.

May God add His blessing to our study of this portion of His wonderful Word!

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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